2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

613 754 578 626 members goes to an outsider and grumbles to him about the family squabbles[1] and quarrels. The outsider then takes the opportunity of using this squabble to introduce his sorcery into the lineage. The Yao greatly fear backbiting because of their dread of sorcery and none dreads it more than a village headman, a warden of a sorority-group,[2] or a person in the position of having to keep a matrilineage or section together. These people are continually adjuring the women under them—for it is the women who are believed to be the main culprits—not to fight among themselves; and if they do, not to take their complaints to an outsider but to the senior member of the matrilineage. The significance of this in relation to lineage unity is plain enough.

613 578 843 224 Apart from sorcery, strained relationships between members of a matrilineage are believed to be dangerous for other reasons. Malice may adversely affect people who are in mystically dangerous states. The most common of these states is pregnancy. If a woman has a quarrel with a matrilineage member while she is pregnant she is likely to have a difficult labour. The Yao say 'the womb has heard these bad words'. Another situation where malice or quarrelling will cause difficulties is in hunting. The luck of the chase is capricious and malice may easily bring bad fortune to an otherwise good hunter. For example, a successful hunter once gave each of his two sisters a piece of venison. Each complained that the other had been given the larger piece and quarrelled vehemently about it for weeks. The hunter now found that no game fell into his traps. He went to a diviner who indicated the quarrel of the sisters as the cause of his failure and told the hunter to get them to 'blow water' (*kupesya*). He did this; good relationships were restored and his traps were filled once more.

613 578 769 755 These deleterious effects, like the curse, are connected in some way with the ancestor spirits. This is sometimes expressed quite clearly when a person is called upon to 'blow water'. A mother who wishes to revoke a curse, a woman who wishes to recant her malice towards her matrilineal relative who is suffering in childbirth, or a man whose sister's son is ill supposedly because

[1] This is called *miseri*, which I have translated as 'backbiting'. This idea is extremely important, as we shall see later.

[2] i.e. those men who are responsible for their sisters and their descendants. See p. 145 ff.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of his malice towards him, might equally be called upon to do this. The person makes a statement to the effect that he bears no malice and hopes that the sufferer will be well. For example, a woman in Cikoja village who was called upon to 'blow water' during the labour pains of her mother's younger sister's daughter's daughter,[1] because they had quarrelled over a sifting basket, put some water in her mouth, spat it out and said: 'Those words I spoke: the basket is mine. This is my child. Both are mine. When I spoke and asked my child about it, they were not words to place in my heart, so that to-day we should have to go to the diviner because my child is hitched[2] and be accused because of the sifting basket. These words I push aside. I do not know whether there are other words that we fought about, but if they are these, my daughter's child come out!'[3] Sometimes the ancestors are specifically invoked, '*Conde, conde vwamasoka . . .*' 'Please, please, O spirits . . .' This is a public confession of the tension within the lineage and it allows the lineage leaders to attempt to straighten out the difficulties, as they did in this case.[4]

These beliefs in mystical dangers of one sort or another which beset the matrilineage as the result of bad feelings within it, have the effect of constraining matrilineage members to maintain peaceable relations among themselves and are, therefore, conducive to maximum solidarity.

It is clear from MacDonald's writings that in earlier times the periodic offerings to the spirits of the ancestors was a valuable way in which the solidarity of the matrilineage was expressed. With the introduction of Islam and Christianity these sacrifices have disappeared. I have not worked in Christian areas long enough to be able to say whether the ancestor cult still persists. In the northern area, however, I can say that the ancestor cult survives as part of the practice of Islam. Periodically, feasts are held in

[1] See the history of the division in Cikoja lineage, pp. 165–6.

[2] *Kukolekwa*, i.e. the child cannot be born.

[3] *Une malôŵegala ciwlo cila cangune. Aju muvanangu. Yosope yangune. Pinuwecitaga nikuwoya, kumbuzya muvanangu, nginiwa malôŵe gakwiha kuntima, gati mpaku lelo nikwenda kuciunga cakolekwa muvanangu nikunkamula une ligonga lya ciwlo. Cekgo ngututuka. Kwalini nagopali gani getuwa kangamile nambo nagogoga malôŵe gakwe, cinkulu cangu cikopece.*

[4] I have drawn attention to the cathartic effect of accusations of sorcery and public confession of guilt in a paper, 'A Note on the African Conception of Causality', *The Nyasaland Journal*, v, 2 (July 1952), 57–8.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

757 Simple incision is practised for relief of pain or again "medicine" may be introduced into the wound. Such medicine usually consists of charcoal prepared from various vegetable substances. There is no evidence that any active medicinal principles are involved and the most that is attained is probably a certain amount of counter-irritation. For pain, a string is tied tightly round the part; thus for headache one sees a string tied round the head and doubtless some relief is felt when pressure is made on the temples. A man with an abscess of the hand or foot will tie a string round the arm or leg, but I have never seen it so applied as to produce any effect comparable to that of Bier's hyperaemic treatment. By analogy a string may be worn round the chest for pleuritic pain and by limiting movement may be effective. In many cases a charm is attached to the string as an adjuvant.

The use of drugs as such is widespread but I have very little evidence of their efficacy. The methods of administration are various. The vapor bath is often used. Over a pot of water in which have been dropped herbs and stones heated in a fire, the patient squats enveloped in a blanket and is thereby subjected to the action of the medicated steam. This method is also adopted for enemism. A case which came recently to my notice was the wife of a native hospital dresser who, suffering pain in the abdomen, avoided my ministrations and consulted a female medicine-maker. She was given a vapor bath as above described and after a few moments, the medicine-woman clapped her on the back and told her to rise. The old woman plunged her hands into the pot and brought forth some human hair tied in a piece of calico and a human metacarpal bone. "These are what troubled you," she said — fee £1! This is called *ku-lopiola*, to take evil things out for.

[795] Various powdered barks and leaves are applied to ulcers and appear to have an astringent effect in some cases but the majority seem to go from bad to worse. No other external applications have been observed except one for scabies. Incision of the skin and insertion of "medicine" have been mentioned above.

Large numbers of vegetable products are administered by mouth, always in the form of an infusion or suspension. It is probable that a number of these are really beneficial but I am not able to speak in detail of their effects. Many astringents are undoubtedly used for diarrhoea. Herbs containing oil are used for gonorrhoea.

757 751 Apart from magic medicine dealt with elsewhere and commonly employed for purposes outside disease, charms are used for the prevention and treatment of ordinary diseases and injuries. There are only a few varieties of charms. A vegetable substance, root or stem, may be worn on a string round the part of the body concerned. Thus one sees a couple of little pieces of stick, *mbiji*, on a string tied round the head, round the arm or round the chest for headache, a whitlow or diarrhoea as the case may be. The medicine may be in the form of a preparation, generally charred vegetable substances, and is made into a little packet in leaves and cloth worn most commonly round the neck; it is called *kutwewa*. Such a charm is supposed to be effective against all ills.

3:Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

knees and elbows, at intervals swaying their bodies from side to side and clapping their hands. *Kasungu* then ordered all to go and bathe, men and women separately. As they returned from the stream, rain began to fall.

Intercession on behalf of the sick may be made, especially by anyone who is likely to be accused of causing the illness by witchcraft.[1] The man standing with arms outstretched, downwards and a little in front of his body, the hands supine, takes some water in his mouth and discharges it in a stream on the ground, (probably as a sign of purification of his tongue), and then invoking "all the spirits above," asks that they will intercede to restore health to the sick man and bear witness to his own innocence of any wish to do the sick man injury. *Ku-pepa* is the word meaning to offer sacrifice and prayer.

Harvesting and hunting are occasions when sacrifices may be offered. It was formerly the custom for the chief to determine the day on which harvesting of millet should begin. On the day appointed, a big drum was beaten in the village and word passed round; then everyone would go down to his garden, gather a head of millet, and bring it back to the village where it was all handed over to the chief's headwife. After drying and thrashing, a little of the grain was laid at the grave of an old chief by one of the reigning chief's advisers, the remainder being again distributed to all the people gathered together in the village meeting-place, who ate it raw. After this ceremony, harvesting began.

In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a bunch or two and reverently lays one at the foot of a *mavo* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *mavo*, she gives the rest to the child.

When a hunting expedition makes its first killing, part of the flesh of the animal is laid at the base of a tree as a thank offering to the spirits and in anticipation of further favors to be conferred. All such offerings are supposed by the natives to be partaken of by the spirits, though they are well aware that they do not actually diminish in quantity. There is an interesting point in this connection: any man who has acted as *nhilo* (undertaker) to some well-known man may appropriate these offerings. In the case of the hunting offering, he will run round the tree, saying, "I am a hyaena, the spirits will not mind me," and will then take part of the flesh-offering and eat it.

In the same way, a *nhilo* may drink from a grave beer-pot after three days, when the spirits are supposed to have taken what they want.

With the exception of the *mavo* tree above mentioned (*ndima*, Chin.), and possibly another called *nsilo-nguma* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by *masoé*, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred.[2] The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may

[1] *Vide supra*, p. 287.

[2] The natives of British Central Africa, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

3:Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

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As an example of another kind of intermediary may be mentioned a woman called Binibi Chikanowa, who, though an Anyanja, was well known among the Yao of Zomba. She was consulted on many occasions about the future, about rain, or the prevention of disease. She was a woman of quiet ways and greatly respected; she had no fixed abode but was received everywhere and given food and shelter. She would sometimes disappear from the district and travel to far distant places. A son, born to her when a young woman, was lately a patient under my care, a man of about forty-eight. On one occasion she was consulted about an epidemic of ulcers among the people near Zomba. She asked all the people from the villages to go down to Lake Shirwa and to take a white fowl with them. When they had all collected, she appeared, carrying in each hand a little gourd containing *mbepesi* flour, and a small open basket on her head. She took the fowl in one hand and then proceeded to walk into the water, saying she would have to go to a little hill on an island in the lake called *Chidio Mpiri* and that she would come back in three days. She then walked on into the water and disappeared below its surface. In three days time, she returned to the village and said that the women must give up dancing the *chipondo* dance for twelve months and all would be well.

On other occasions she usually worked along similar lines. Consulted as to whether or not some sick person would recover, she always answered with the same formula, if she thought he would die, "The house is prepared for him and medicine would avail nothing!"

791 828

There are certain other supernatural persons or spirits to which reference must be made. *Chimelo-mesi* has been mentioned above. *Masuwa*, a word which Hetherwick translates as "madness, idiocy,"[1] really refers to the delusions and hallucinations which form part of the perceptions of the insane. The word also has the meaning of obsession, phobia, and intuition; thus the natives say of an ox about to be slaughtered that shows signs of realizing the approaching evil, "it has *masuwa*." On the other hand, they say the hartebeest is a foolish animal that does not know what to do when hunted: "it has *masuwa*, it is a deluded animal." Again, the baboon and the crow "have *masuwa*"; they are possessed of senses or faculties which warn them of the approach of any enemies before they can be seen or heard; they cannot be stalked. In all these cases, the crowd of hallucinatory men pursuing some melancholic, the rats of the delirium tremens patient, and that which appears to warn the crow or the baboon, are all *masuwa* and are, I think, supposed by the natives to have some kind of materialistic form.

791 789

Ndondoka: when the *wasuzi*[2] do not wish immediately to devour the body of a deceased person which they have raised from the grave, they cut off the arms and legs at the elbows and knees and insert medicine into the stumps; these living-dead are then compelled by the *wasuzi* to live in caves and hollow ant hills during the day and to follow them at night in their travels, "like a herd of goats," to be eaten as required. The *ndondoka* may be heard as they wander along in the night, making sounds like a cat's mew. A woman will

[1] Yao language, op. cit., p. 338. [2] Vide supra, p. 316.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

774 123 they said, "was about to take away their shadows and they would die." In their mind the *liselo* was allied to the *chitwilili* or picture, and the removal of it to the photographic plate would mean the disease or death of the shadeless body.

123 753 774 As an instance of their faith in the close relationship of the *liselo* and the picture or shadow, I may relate the following incident. An influential Yao chief on Mount Zomba with whom I was on terms of intimate friendship for years, refused to allow himself to be photographed, fearing the consequences on his life. At last I was able to persuade him to give me a sitting, but on the sole condition that the picture was to be shown to none of his subjects but to be sent out of the country as soon as possible. He feared lest some ill-wisher might use it as a means towards his bewitchment. Some months afterwards the chief became seriously ill, and in the minds of his attendants his illness was attributed to some accident having befallen the photographic plate on which they believed the picture of their chief to be imprinted. If that negative had been broken in England, whither it had been sent, their chief's illness would be accounted for. Accordingly they appealed to the divining oracle, who, however, after consulting the "lota," assured them that the picture was intact, and that in consequence the disease must be ascribed to some other cause.

774 787 The *liselo* or soul is recognized as the chief agency in dreams. To dream is, in the Yao tongue, *kwanamila masoka*, where *masoka* is the plural form of *liselo*. The *liselo* is supposed to go out and visit the scenes and persons it dreams about, and in turn is visited by the *masoka* of others, dead or living. Pains in the body on rising from sleep in the morning are usually attributed to such nocturnal visits, [753] while disease or pains of a severe type are ascribed to castigations by the whips of the *masoka* or more frequently of the witches who prowl around during the night watches.

774 828 Madness, idiocy and the ravings of delirium or disease are accounted for by a similar agency. The sufferers are *wa masoka*, they of the spirits, and a sudden fit of epilepsy or insanity is described as *gakamwile masoka*, the spirits have seized him. Such persons are usually regarded with awe, as living in close contact with the unseen, but no incantations or enchantments are ever used to expel the spirit in possession. Some native doctors are credited with a knowledge of certain [755] medicines which they say are effectual in such cases, but their application in no way differs from those employed in treating ordinary types of disease. Idiots and the insane are allowed to wander at will about the village, and only when violent symptoms show themselves as a danger to the community is any physical restraint put upon them.

754 The *masoka* are also recognized as the inspiring agencies in the ravings of the witch detective. This person, usually a woman, is called in to discover who is the guilty agent in cases of mysterious deaths or outbreak of an epidemic at a village. She arrives on the scene and takes up her abode for a few days previous to her actual demonstration. She mixes with the people, learns all the scandal and gossip of the community, and at night prowls about the houses searching for